

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE
Washington



Founded 1836

U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Public Health Service

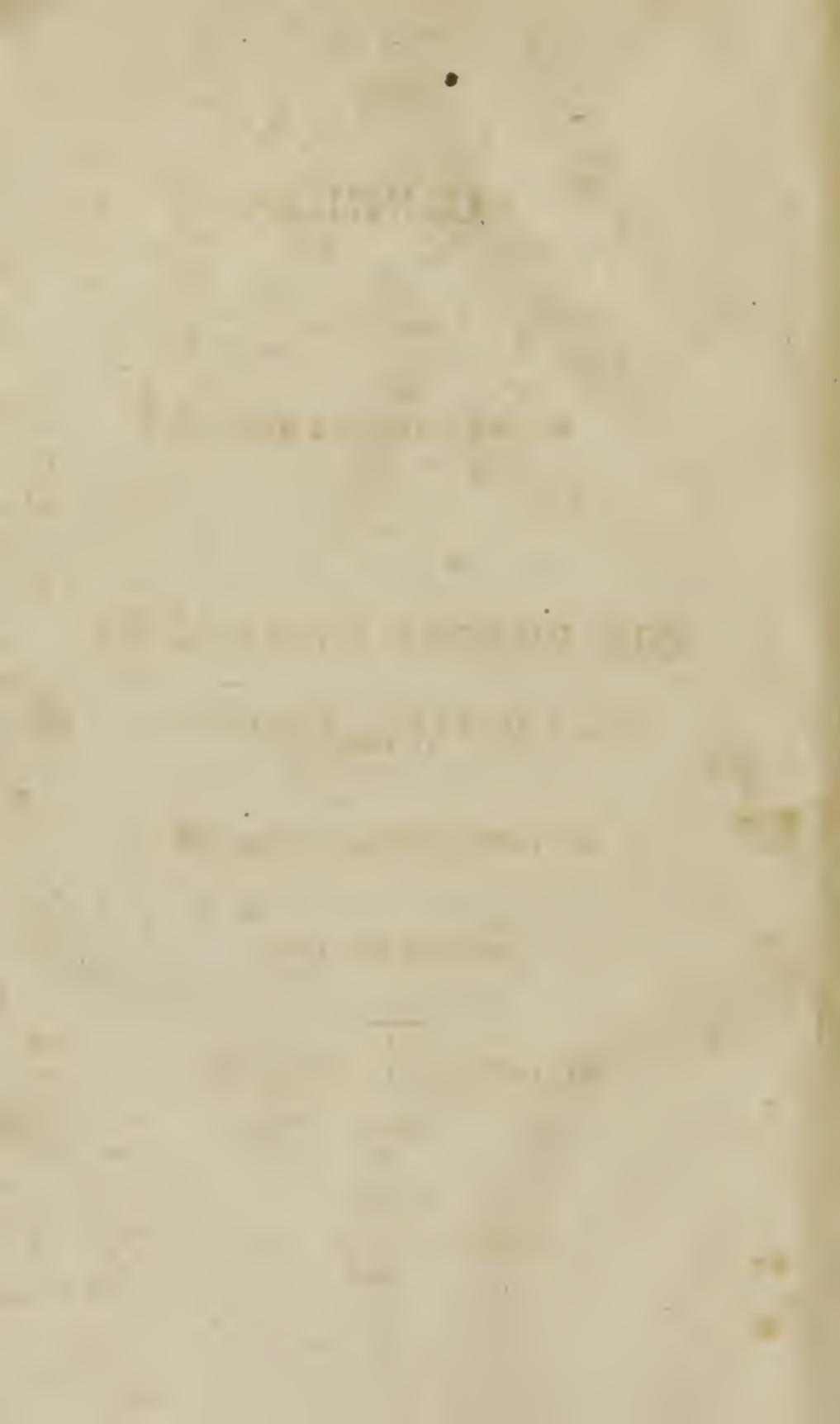
Hung Austin 7 Heibner

Box of Bamkam.

Sept. 13/58



DR. COFFIN'S ADDRESS.



AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE CONTRIBUTORS

OF

THE BOSTON DISPENSARY,

AT THEIR

SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY.

OCTOBER 21, 1813.

BY JOHN G. COFFIN, M. D.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN ELIOT.

1813.

Thursday Evening, October 21, 1813.

To DR. COFFIN.

SIR,

AGREEABLY to a Vote of the Managers of the Boston Dispensary, the subscribers, on behalf of the Board, present to you their thanks for your appropriate Address delivered this day before the Contributors, and request a copy thereof for the press.

We are, with esteem,

WILLIAM PHILLIPS,
SAMUEL DUNN,
CHARLES LOWELL. } Committee.

GENTLEMEN,

IF in your opinion, the publication of the address this day delivered by the appointment of the Managers, can in any measure promote the work of Charity in which we have been engaged, I cannot find a disposition, nor feel at liberty to withhold it.

I am Gentlemen, Respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

J. G. COFFIN.

To His Honour W. PHILLIPS, Esq.

Mr. SAMUEL DUNN, and

The Rev. Mr. LOWELL.

AN ADDRESS, ETC.

BEARING the image of his Creator, it is both the privilege and the duty of man, to imitate his perfections.

It is his privilege because he has the capacity to do so, and his duty because no faculty has been imparted which is not to be exercised and improved.

The doctrine of the improvement of talents, though short in precept, is long in its application ; it is the business of life.

Of the many virtues and duties which this doctrine would embrace, one or two only can be noticed at this time.

The Institution we assemble to cherish and support, is founded in benevolence, and such are its claims, that so long as benevolence finds a seat in the human breast, so long will its friends continue.

If we contemplate for a moment the character of benevolence, the good work we celebrate, will seem naturally to result from so pure a source. Benevolence is an attribute of Heaven, bestowed on man to lessen the ills of this life, and to prepare him for a better state and happier mode of existence.

Without it, we should indeed, compared with the other inhabitants of this earth, be powerful and pre-eminent,—but this would be the power of demons rather than of angels or of men.

Benevolence is not that passive feeling which can be satisfied with doing no injury to our neighbour, or rest contented with mere good wishes for his well-being when he needs our assistance.

They agree who have felt its impulse, that it is an active principle.

It is that charity, or love, of the New Testament, which is so highly commended by St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

“It is not properly a single virtue, but a disposition, residing in the heart, whence flow all the virtues of benignity, candour, forbearance, compassion, and liberality,—as so many native streams.

“From general good will to all, it extends its influence particularly to those with whom we stand in

nearest connexion, and who are directly within the sphere of our good offices."

Revelation has pronounced this charity to be, *the end of the commandment*. "This assertion is doubtless consonant to all that reason can suggest on the subject of religion. For on considering the nature of the Supreme Being, reason gives us much ground to believe, that the chief design of all the commands he has given to men, is to promote their happiness."

To be benevolent then, is to resemble the Author of benevolence, who is emphatically styled Love.*

It is to obey unerring wisdom, and where obedience constitutes happiness. One consideration, if duly weighed, would give to this mode of pursuing that felicity which is the predominant wish of every heart, a preference over all others,—namely—our assurance, that this course alone is crowned with a never-failing success.

It is true, that on this occasion, we are no further concerned with charity, than as it affords aid and relief to poverty and disease.

But who can reasonably expect a regular discharge of this, or of any other branch of the morality of the Gospel, where christian motives and principles

* 1 John, ch. iv.

do not characterize the individual and govern his conduct? Or again, Can the heart swell with gratitude and not confess its obligations, or with love to others and not wish to communicate its joy?

About twenty years ago, when the plan of the Boston Dispensary was first proposed, several benevolent and exemplary citizens of this place, gave it their early approbation and decided support.

If among these, any individual can be justly regarded as the founder of the institution, this distinguished honour must be accorded to the name of *Oliver Smith.*

His exertions were first in time, and foremost in zeal and perseverance.

But this association is not the only monument of his productive benevolence. He has ornamented our city, and repaired the ravages of war.* For a series of years he laboured assiduously to improve a most interesting and important source of national

* For much of the beauty and improved state of the Mall and Common in this town, one of the most pleasant public walks and prospects in the United States, the inhabitants of Boston are indebted to Mr. Smith. During the late war several of the trees were dismantled and destroyed; these he replaced and added largely to their original number.

The graveled way too is almost entirely the result of his public spirit, love of order and improvement.

wealth and population.* Nor is this all; his noble humanity was not confined to deeds of a public nature. Many individuals who survive him, still retain a grateful remembrance of his numerous acts of kindness and friendship. Mr. Smith had not the happiness of being a parent, but he had the greater happiness of possessing a heart which led him to consider every son and daughter of affliction, as children of his family.

So well known was his benignant influence, and so highly estimated his ready assistance, that those who lived nigh him esteemed it not less a privilege than a security.

In the silent hours of night, when our own weakness and need of protection are most sensibly felt, often have the fears of the widowed mother, watchful for the safety of her house and children, after knowing that this guardian friend was at home, and near her,—been calmed to tranquil sleep. This is not the language of fiction, but of unexaggerated truth.

This system for the medical relief of the poor, having been in operation from the year 1796, and found es-

* For several years Mr. Smith acted as Secretary to the Agricultural Society of Massachusetts. In this office his duties were punctually performed, and his exertions to further and promote the great interests of agriculture, not only as they relate to his native State, but to his country generally, were unremitted.

sentially useful, the Legislature of this State in 1801, thought proper to incorporate a number of gentlemen, its early patrons, by the name of "The Boston Dispensary." Since this period, many liberal contributors have been added to the catalogue of its previous friends.

These benefactors of their race, imitating the example of Him who not only lived, but even gave up his life to save the lives of men,—have provided relief for several thousands of their fellow beings, who of themselves had no visible means to stay the wasting of disease, or prolong their existence.

Long may they live, exempt from the sufferings they have removed from others, happy in the consciousness of doing good, and in receiving the blessing of those who were ready to perish.

For seventeen years this institution has now been before the public, a period sufficiently long to prove its merits and establish its character.

During this interval, what has been said of it? Nothing has reached our ears but commendation. Nothing but acknowledgments from the Managers for a generous support; nothing but expressions of gratitude from those who receive its provisions.

To the honour of those concerned it ought to be recorded, that a sufficient number of gentlemen, possessing the desired qualifications, have at all times been found, in a busy and commercial town, ready and disposed to conduct its financial concerns;—to devise and execute such internal regulations as are best suited to produce the largest possible amount of benefit, from the means entrusted to their application.

In every succeeding year, the full number of well educated and humane physicians have appeared, cheerfully to undertake, and faithfully to discharge the medical duties of the institution, without any pecuniary emolument.

It is not to be supposed that the motives of the attending physicians have been wholly foreign from considerations of personal advantage. They have doubtless been actuated by the hope of professional improvement, and the prospect of building up an honest fame, as well as by the desire of fulfilling the benevolent intentions of this Charity.

These incitements however are so worthy and commendable, and their duties, now become laborious, have been performed with such assiduity, with so much of the spirit of charity, that these gentlemen have well deserved the thanks of the friends of hu-

manity, and have earned for themselves an honourable distinction.

I cannot omit briefly to notice in this place, a subject, not less interesting to the friends of this institution, nor less important to the sick, than any other. I allude to the occasional employment of nurses.

I am credibly informed, and from observation believe, that a number of discreet women might readily be found, who for a trifling compensation, would perform this duty with equal benefit to the sick, and satisfaction to all concerned.

Supposing, what not unfrequently happens, that the patient is the mother of several small children, and that the father is abroad seeking his daily bread. What can be expected, in these and similar cases, from the best efforts of the physician, or from the medicines prescribed, without that assistance which nurses only are suited to give ? For what good purpose are the oil and wine laid at the feet of the bruised and sick, if there be no friendly Samaritan to apply them to the wound ? The want of funds merely has delayed this arrangement. The hope is indulged, and almost the belief, that this will not long be the case.

It may be enquired by those persons whose situation has not led them to an acquaintance with this scheme of charity, What are its claims on the countenance and support of the community?

It is replied, that the claims of the Boston Dispensary, are those of the needy and the sick. We have no other claims to prefer, no other end to effect, than to heal or mitigate this complicated misery.

A state of poverty has its peculiar trials and privations.

Early indigence excludes the means of cultivating those intellectual faculties which place man among intelligent beings. It is not less deprived of the aid necessary to develop and discipline the moral powers, so indispensable in forming the christian character.

When advanced to maturity, the poor man more than others, is subjected to the action of injustice and caprice, one of the most painful trials of dependent and ingenuous minds.

If, for instance, his patron directs him to exercise his elective privilege against his own better judgment and conscience, he must either forfeit the dearest right of free and honest men, or lose his bread.

If a calumny is raised against innocence, he must give it circulation and assent, or incur the displeasure

of one on whose breath his living is suspended. In a thousand instances he is tempted to violate his principles to serve his interest.

I do not mean that great interest which should form and direct his life, but that currency in the world, or subserviency to it, on which his subsistence depends.

But they who have felt poverty need no aid of mine to be informed what it is ; they who have not tasted its bitter ingredients, may form some idea of it, by supposing themselves at once deprived of all the comfort, the security, and happiness which competence supplies, and of all the value and importance usually attached to superfluous gold.

This is not an imaginary case merely, but an event frequently witnessed in the revolutions incident to property. Some of the ordinary effects of these changes, effects not to be regretted, are these ; new and more just views of poverty ;—of the claims of the unfortunate and virtuous poor, and more reasonable and salutary impressions respecting the real value and best use of wealth.

It is well known that in this town there are decent, reputable persons, living with straitened economy on the wreck of former sufficiency, or the scanty allow-

ance of some relative or friend ; there are labourers, industrious when employment can be had, who with every care and effort, can hardly maintain themselves, and perhaps increasing families, even in years of health and common prosperity.

In these cases we easily perceive how oppressive must be the additional embarrassment and distress, where time is lost, and new expences arise from the occurrence of sickness.

Mankind in all ages and conditions of life, have been very nearly agreed in the sentiment, that disease is so grievous a calamity, that no sacrifice or effort can be too great or expensive, for its cure or mitigation.

What then must be the wretchedness of that sick man who has neither the means to procure a remedy, nor a friend to administer it !

The various causes of poverty, the best methods of removing them, and the temper with which their effects, when inevitable, should be borne,—though highly interesting and important topics, must be left to the investigation of others. It is enough for us, while aiding the purpose of the present occasion, to be assured that the poor are always to be with us, and that they are exposed to disease.

It would be difficult, in my judgment, to conceive a plan of beneficence, better entitled than the one before us, to the public patronage ; to the bounty of the rich, the services of the active and benevolent, and to the good will and sympathy of those who have nothing else to offer. This is not that promiscuous giving, which with pure motives sometimes produces immoral effects ;—it is a specific appropriation, for a definite, humane, and laudable object.

In the exercise of benevolence, the happiness conferred, is not exclusively on the part of the recipient.

He who communicates of his substance to the poor, of his benevolence to the affections of others, hereby enlarges that sublime enjoyment which malignant or selfish minds can neither participate nor conceive.

Thus by a gracious law of our nature, he who labours most for the happiness of others, is himself the most happy.

Our good propensities are invigorated and confirmed by use, and our rational and moral gratifications, must ever be in proportion to our disinterested motives to fulfil the law of kindness.

But when I recollect the many instances and multiplied evidence, of the public spirit, charity and munificence, of this enlightened, favoured, and chris-

tian metropolis ; I deem it alike unnecessary and improper to attempt, by any elaborate persuasion, to urge on this respected assembly, a liberal contribution, on this anniversary.

I am happy in the belief, and rest satisfied with the conviction, that those who hear me will do justice to themselves, and to the cause that has brought us together ; and that we shall all this day experience that it is more blessed to possess the ability and the disposition to give, than to be compelled to receive.

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

THE BOSTON DISPENSARY

FOR THE MEDICAL RELIEF OF THE POOR, WAS INSTITUTED IN 1796;

IT WAS INCORPORATED IN 1801.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION,

October 9, 1812.

At the Annual Meeting of the Contributors, October 14, 1813,
the following officers were chosen for the year ensuing.

MANAGERS.

His Honour **WILLIAM PHILLIPS**, Chairman.

WILLIAM SMITH, Esq. **MR. WM. MACKAY**,

MR. SAMUEL DUNN, **MR. JOS. COOLIDGE, JUN.**

THOMAS BALDWIN, D. D. **DR. J. G. COFFIN**,

REV. CHARLES LOWELL, **MR. JOS. TILDEN**,

MR. SAMUEL SNELLING, **MR. ISAAC WINSLOW**.

MR. SAMUEL H. WALLEY,

MR. GIDEON SNOW, *Treasurer.*

MR. ISAAC WINSLOW, *Secretary.*

CONSULTING PHYSICIANS.

JOHN WARREN, M. D.

AARON DEXTER, M. D.

ATTENDING PHYSICIANS.

JACOB BIGELOW, M. D. *Southern District.*WILLIAM GAMAGE, M. D. *Middle do.*JOHN REVERE, M. D. *Northern do.*

In the year 1802, the town was divided into three Dispensary districts, since which time there have been annually chosen two consulting and three attending physicians.



There are three classes of contributors,

1. Those who pay 50 dollars, and thus acquire the right, during life, of keeping four patients at one time under the care of the Dispensary.
2. Those who pay 10 dollars annually, and possess the same right for the year.
3. Those who pay five dollars annually, and have the right of keeping two patients on the Dispensary.

Subscriptions will be received by the Treasurer,

GIDEON SNOW, 26, *Long Wharf,*

And by all the Managers.



The expenses for the year ending October, 1812,

were

\$ 1016, 00

The amount of subscriptions for the same year, was 1055, 00

The permanent Funds of the Corporation being yet inadequate, the chief dependance of the Managers is on the yearly subscription of the Contributors.

The benefit to be derived from this institution must be in proportion to its revenue. The utmost economy in the expenditures is observed from necessity. The wine which has been at times more freely allowed, is now much reduced in quality and quantity, and no Hospital Stores, or nurses can be paid for at present.

Since its commencement the following gentlemen have gratuitously served the Dispensary, as physicians and surgeons.

AS CONSULTING PHYSICIANS.

JAMES LLOYD,	JOHN WARREN,
ISAAC RAND,	AARON DEXTER.

AS ATTENDING PHYSICIANS.

JOHN FLEET,	CYRUS PERKINS,
ISAAC RAND, JR.	S. R. TREVETT,
JOHN DIXWELL,	ASA BULLARD,
JAMES JACKSON,	WM. GAMAGE,
J. G. COFFIN,	JACOB GATES,
HORACE BEAN,	JACOB BIGELOW,
THOMAS J. PARKER,	JOHN REVERE.
JOHN GORHAM,	

— + —
DONORS AND CONTRIBUTORS.

Besides a respectable number of subscriptions of fifty dollars each, the following legacies have been bequeathed to this Charity.

From Mr. Thomas Smith, in 1800,	\$ 333, 33
---------------------------------	------------

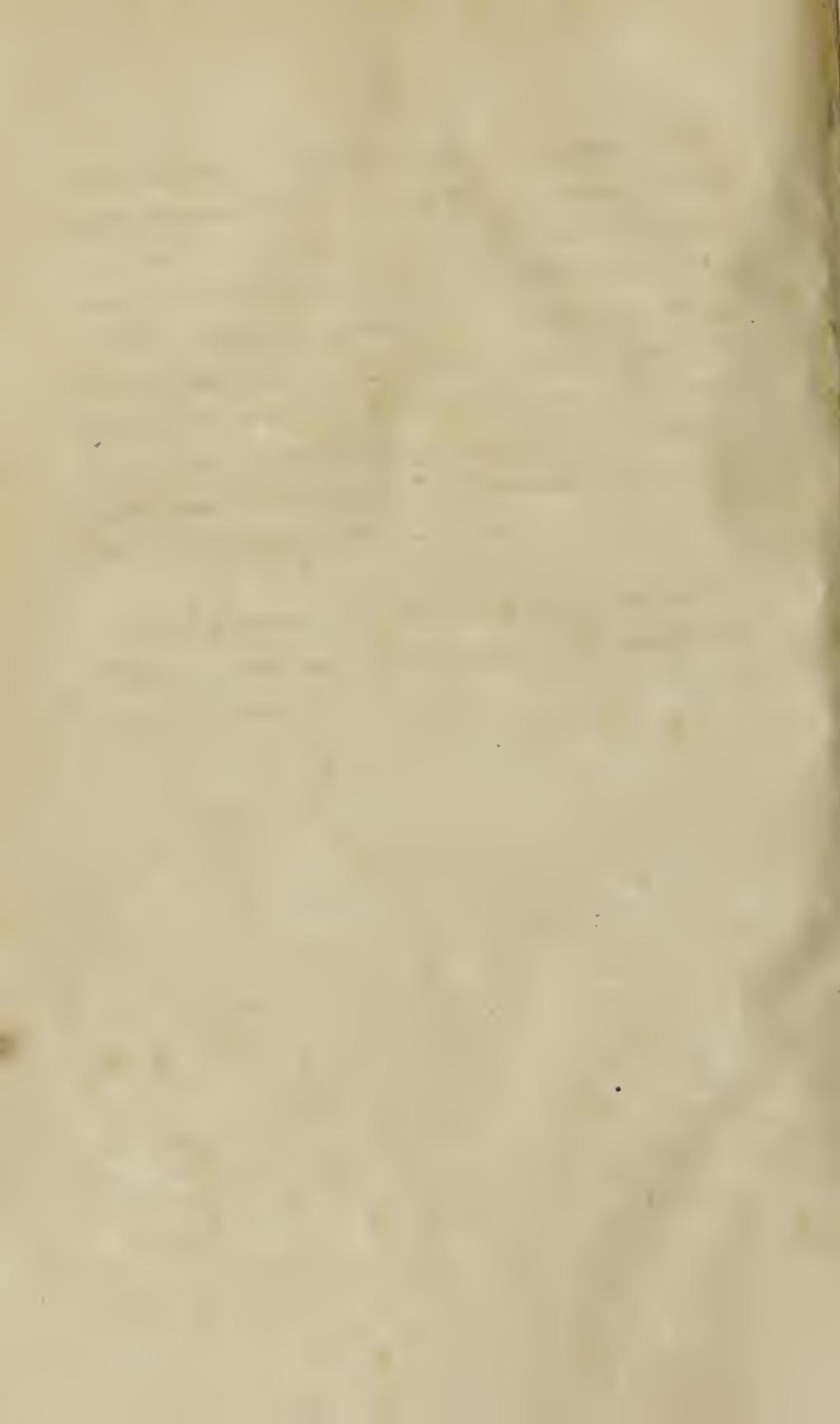
From the late Madam Esther Sprague, of Dedham,	
--	--

in 1811—	1500, 00
----------	----------

In order duly to estimate the character and magnitude of Mr. Smith's benevolence and liberality, it should be remembered that he was not a man of wealth or notoriety. He possessed but little property and was hardly known in society. This institution too was but in its *infancy* at that period, and its tendency and effects were not fully unfolded. These circumstances considered, we think nothing but the most pure and disinterested charity could have produced the offering which we acknowledge with admiration.

Mrs. Sprague's donation has been already noticed, and will long be recollected with grateful emotions.

Eight thousand and five hundred persons have already been relieved by this establishment, and the applications for assistance are constantly increasing.



Med. Hist.

WZ

270

C 675a

1813

C.1

